8

RELIGION, SOCIAL CONSTITUENCY REPRESENTATION AND INTEREST ARTICULATION

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Former army parachutist and the self-proclaimed ‘Trump’ of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro came to power in the 2018 Brazilian presidential elections supported by a coalition of Christian evangelicals, Catholics and secular voters grown weary of corruption scandals that landed several leading politicians in prison (Puglie 2018). Similarly, the Republican Party in the United States, although not a religious political party per se, draws on votes from evangelical Protestants, highly committed members of other religions and secular conservatives (Castle 2018). In turn, religious parties such as the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India include a wide spectrum of religious and secular nationalist politicians and voters, a coalition that made the BJP the world’s largest political party in terms of membership (Vaishnav 2019). Seemingly, secular and religious parties alike rely on support of both secular and religious constituencies to win elections. The questions we contemplate in this chapter are how religious parties appeal to voters’ secular programmatic preferences and how such appeals are related to religious party electoral success.

A brief answer provided by the cases we consider is that, like other parties, religious political parties appeal to voters in a variety of clientelistic and programmatic ways that include but often extend well beyond the faith. For example, religious parties, like United Torah Judaism, in Israel appeal to non-orthodox constituencies through their housing, education and social policies (Shalev 2019). The BJP in India appeals to secular nationalists through its economic programmes (Mohseni and Wilcox 2009: 213). Indonesian Islamist organisations such as the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah provide various services including food programmes to the public in the Outer Islands of the archipelago, helping to secure votes for parties with which they affiliate (Hadiz 2010, 2016). Many of these secular policies likely also appeal to the pious who do not care only about religious issues but consider a range of policies when deciding which party to support (Pepinsky et al. 2018). Therefore, where secular parties compete with religious parties for the votes of the faithful, support for both types of parties likely fluctuates with their relative appeal across religious and more secular issues and constituencies.

In contrast to the literature that has focused mainly on established Western democracies, (Mohseni and Wilcox 2009), we explore the cases of Turkey and Indonesia to speculate about the mechanisms between religious party appeals for voter support and resultant party electoral success.
fortunes in younger democracies. We suggest that in Turkey, an Islamist political party built strategic coalitions around secular issues that garnered the party broad support from the pious and more secular voters alike, while in Indonesia, secular parties are effectively competing with religious parties as representatives of issues relating to the faith and beyond.

The rest of this chapter is divided into four parts. The first provides a brief review of the literature on religion, political parties and motivations of voters in young democracies. Second, we examine how the Islamist Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) aligned with and articulated the interests of liberal, ultra-nationalist, ethnic and anti-military constituents in Turkey. The third part probes the case of Indonesia to discuss how moderate religious parties originally garnered the votes of corruption-weary middle-class voters. However, over time, Islamist parties began losing this support due to rising corruption in their own ranks and increase in competition over the religious constituencies with secular parties that more effectively built coalitions to incorporate voters who care both about religious and other policy issues. The fourth section summarises and concludes.

**Religion, political parties and representation of constituency interests**

In Lipset and Rokkan’s (1967) framework of party system development, religion defines voter alignments in terms of both religious/denominational differences within the centre–periphery cleavages and religious versus secular conceptualisations of church–state relations. Subsequent proponents of secularisation theory emphasised the progressively declining role of religion in politics (Parsons 1966; Tönnies 2001), particularly in economically developed democratic countries (Broughton and ten Napel 2000). In contrast, Finke and Stark (1992) argue that despite secularisation, the role of religion in politics did not subside, it merely transformed. For example, post-1945 Christian Democratic parties in Western Europe acted as ‘people’s parties’ (Volksparteien) and coalesced with secular parties to stay in power. More broadly others showed evidence of increasing religiosity in less developed nations at the turn of this century, and in largely secular nations a high number of people that professed a belief in some form of a higher power (Gill 2001).² Thus, scholars continued examining how religious parties participate in secular democratic politics (Kalyvas 1996; Gehler and Kaiser 2004; Birnir and Satana 2013; Brocker and Künkler 2013). Briefly, some maintain that religious identity and religiosity are an important determinant of political mobilisation and party loyalties, often overlapping with class cleavages (Bartolini and Mair 1990; Layman 1997; Knutsen 2004). Others attribute the electoral success of nominally ‘religious’ parties to their flexibility in attracting voters who are not church-goers but nonetheless share core values such as anti-communism and social market economy (Duncan 2015: 577).

While the research on religion and political parties has long focused on Christian democracy in Western Europe, more recently, interest has surged in the formation and rise of religious political parties in developing democracies (Mainwaring and Scully 2003; Wuhs 2013), especially in the Middle East and Muslim world (Kalyvas 2000; Tezcür 2010). For example, various theories explain why Islamist parties in the Middle East and North Africa gained popularity. These include religious parties providing an alternative to repressive secular regimes (Mohseni and Wilcox 2009), as providers of social services (Tessler 1997; Langohr 2001), and as a reaction to Israel (Hamid 2011). Others suggest Islamist parties are better able credibly to commit to voters’ expectations that they deliver public goods (Rohac 2013) and/or address income inequality, poverty and underdevelopment in ways that their secular counterparts have failed to do. For example, Chibber (1996) demonstrates that, in Algeria, the rising discontent of the middle class with the economic policies of the secularist incumbent National Liberation Front
led middle-class voters to shift their support to the Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique du Salut, FIS). Although the Islamist FIS was dismantled by a military coup in 1992, it had sweeping success in local elections in 1990 and in the first round of the 1992 general elections. Similarly, Clark (2004) shows that rather than owing their success only to patron–client relationships between the Islamist elite and the religiously conservative poor, Islamic social institutions in Egypt, Jordan and Yemen serve affiliated parties by creating and mobilising middle-class networks that cut through Islamist versus non-Islamist divisions.

Overall, just as Christian democracy in Europe successfully adapted to liberal democratic institutions by expanding party platforms beyond confessional identity, the rise of Islamist parties is not exclusively driven by appeals to religious identity and religiosity but more broadly encompasses common economic and social concerns. Accordingly, the case studies of Turkey and Indonesia show that religious political parties in these cases have exploited non-religious issues and engaged with different interest groups in society to consolidate and expand their social religious and secular constituencies, with greater or lesser success.

Coalition of multiple social constituency interests: the rise and reign of the AKP in Turkey

The AKP came to power in Turkey as a single party majority government in 2002 following more than a decade of political and economic instability. It was the first time in Turkish political history that a political party descending from a radical Islamist movement, Milli Görüş (National Outlook) established in the 1970s, won an election and formed the government without any coalition partners. The AKP was a split from the Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi, FP), the fourth in the chain of political parties founded by the Milli Görüş, which were all banned by the Constitutional Court in Turkey on the grounds of their anti-secular activities. From the beginning, AKP leaders attempted to distance the party from the political Islam discourse of the FP and its predecessors, identifying more with ‘conservative democrats’ (Akdoğan 2004). Symbolically, the leader of the party, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, publicly declared that he ‘took off’ the shirt he wore in Milli Görüş. Despite these overtures to centre-right and liberal elements in the Turkish political spectrum, the founding cadre of the AKP were clearly ‘reformed’ Islamists (Atacan 2005). Thus, the Islamist agenda and background of the party guided its policies in social issues, such as in lifting the ban on headscarves and in the controversial regulations of the status of Islamic high schools, which became increasingly prominent as the party consolidated power among its electoral support base of religious Sunni Muslims.

Mardin’s (1973) classic framework on centre–periphery relationship in Turkey is often invoked to explain the AKP’s rise into power in 2002 and its repeated success in subsequent elections (Dağ 2005; Çarkoğlu 2008; Hale and Özbudun 2009). The framework, that identifies the division between an urban, secularist elite at the centre and religiously conservative, traditional periphery as the main social cleavage in Turkey is, indeed, a good explanation of voting behaviour in Turkey (Çarkoğlu 2008; Özkân 2017). However, the AKP has also frequently sought and succeeded in expanding its electoral base by forming pragmatic alliances to appeal to the non-religious preferences and interests of both secular and religious segments of society. Consequently, the AKP has won six parliamentary and two presidential elections since 2002.

To provide an example of how religious political parties strategically build constituencies around secular issues to rise to and stay in power, the remainder of this section identifies and discusses AKP alliances throughout its reign of almost two decades with four actors across the spectrum from more secular to more devout. These are the (1) liberal intelligentsia, (2) newly emerging provincial capitalists, (3) ethnic Kurds, and (4) Turkish nationalists. These examples do
not constitute an exhaustive list of all the interest groups that AKP partnered with. Rather, our aim is merely to illustrate the range of constituencies whose interests were represented at some point across a variety of policies by this Islamist party.

Since the 1980 coup, a powerful economic and politically liberal current runs through the Turkish intelligentsia, the media, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the business elite. Early on, optimists in this group praised the liberal and reformist agenda of the AKP that consisted of a commitment to free market economy, and political liberalisation, and aimed for Turkey’s full European Union membership. Moreover, many considered the AKP a model that could demonstrate to the world and to the region that Islam and democracy can coexist (Fuller 2004; Taspinar 2012). One of the most important pillars of this support was the government’s stance against the military tutelage that had long afflicted democratic consolidation in Turkey (Satana 2008). The AKP’s religious conservative constituency, the EU and the liberal intelligentsia all supported the continued decrease of the military’s role in national security affairs and dismantling of the idea of the military as a ‘guardian of the secular state’. Similarly, some scholars welcomed the entry of the AKP into Turkish political life as a powerful actor with Islamist credentials (Kinzer 2003; Önis and Keyman 2003; Nasr 2005; Somer 2007).

It is difficult to measure the tangible effects that this alliance had on the AKP’s votes. Support from the liberal media and NGOs as well as the EU undoubtedly strengthened the AKP’s hand in delivering early religious reforms such as removal of the headscarf ban. This support also afforded legitimacy to more controversial actions such as the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials that on questionable legal grounds prosecuted hundreds of military officers with accusations of coup plans. At the time, sceptics, doubting the AKP’s commitment to democracy and secularism (Onar 2007), questioned the AKP’s role as a democratising actor that brings together liberal values and Islamism and warned against a creeping Islamisation and/or authoritarianism (Toprak et al. 2009; Şen 2010; Rodrik 2011). After 17 years of AKP rule that has grown increasingly authoritarian in recent years, the debate as to whether the AKP’s transformation from an Islamist to a merely conservative party was genuine or takiye has subsided. The alliance between the liberals and the AKP has dissipated and many optimist scholars have joined the camp of the sceptics (e.g. Önis 2013).

Another alliance crucial to the electoral success of the AKP centred on reviving the economy and achieving high growth rates following the greatest economic meltdown in modern Turkey’s history in 2001. To this end, the party aligned its economic and foreign policy with strong corporate interest groups (Kirişçi 2009). A particularly significant alliance among these was with the so-called ‘Anatolian Tigers’, which include newly emerging small and medium-size business owners, based in provincial centres in largely religious and conservative Anatolia (the periphery), who are represented by the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association (Müşavik İş Adamları Derneği, MÜSİAD).

The Tigers’ ascendance in the 1980s coincided with military rule and Prime Minister Turgut Özal’s replacement of the import substitution model of development with export-oriented growth strategy and liberal market reforms (Şen 2010). However, the biggest winners of the export-led growth strategy were not the small entrepreneurs in the provinces but rather the big industrialists in urban centres. Consequently, small religiously conservative business owners abandoned Özal’s Motherland Party and shifted their support to the radical Islamist Welfare Party (Refah Partisi, RP) (Shambayati 1994). At the time the anti-Western and anti-EU rhetoric of the RP aligned well with the sectoral and structural interests of these religiously conservative entrepreneurs (Demiralp 2009). However, as this new religiously conservative business class became much more competitive in the early 2000s, and started to seek more profitable export markets, their interests changed again. That time many MÜSİAD members
found home in the new more moderate AKP that had split from the radical Islamist RP. AKP policies such as frequent tax amnesties, banking reforms that favoured small and medium-size entrepreneurs, and the EU-oriented reforms that provided access to the new small business class have led to unprecedented growth in Anatolian cities such as Konya, Kayseri and Gaziantep (Demiralp 2009). Therefore, these provincial centres have been AKP strongholds in every election since 2002, even during the recent downturn of the economy.

Kurds are a third constituency that the AKP sought to engage with using a mixture of religious and secular rhetoric and policies. The AKP’s rhetoric concerning Kurdish demands and the solution to the violent conflict with the PKK is based on the notion of ‘Islamic Fraternity’ and the religion, Sunni Islam, that the majority of Turks and Kurds share (Yavuz and Özcan 2006; Birmir and Satana forthcoming). The emphasis on common religious bonds with respect to the Kurdish question is an approach that the AKP adopted from the Milli Görüş tradition (Sakallioglu 1998). While religion overtly remains the main driver in the AKP’s efforts to garner support among the ethnic Kurdish electorate, it is possible to identify at least two other mechanisms through which the party appeals to the Kurds, particularly secular Kurds.

The first of these mechanisms is urban patronage politics in western parts of the country, where ethnic Kurdish activists in AKP ranks use clientelistic networks to instrumentally mobilise Kurdish voters in Istanbul (Akdag 2015). The second mechanism centres on reconciliation with the PKK and secular policies to address Kurdish demands. The AKP started addressing Kurdish demands by passing EU reform packages in 2003 and 2004, that included amendments to lift the ban on broadcasting and naming of children in languages other than Turkish. In 2005, in a speech in the predominantly Kurdish city of Diyarbakır, Erdoğan acknowledged the ‘Kurdish issue’ in Turkey and committed to its resolution. In 2009, secret government negotiations with PKK leaders were revealed. Shortly thereafter, the government declared the ‘Democratic Opening’, under which negotiations with the incarcerated PKK leader Öcalan and the organisation’s leadership in Northern Iraq were carried out, through the mediation of the PKK affiliated ethnic-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (Başv ve Demokrasi Partisi, BDP) and the People’s Democratic Party (Halkın Demokrasi Partisi, HDP). The Solution Process, as the initiative came to be called, continued until after the June 2015 elections, when the PKK broke the latest ceasefire alleging the government supported ISIS in its July 2015 attack against a pro-PKK demonstration in the town of Suruç, Şanlıurfa bordering Syria.

The AKP’s success in garnering Kurdish voters’ support varied over time. The initial reforms seemingly increased the popularity of the party among Kurds. Thus in 12 provinces in South-eastern Anatolia where a majority of the population is ethnically Kurdish, the party’s vote share increased from 19 percent in 2002 to 44 percent in the 2007 election. In contrast, the Solution Process seemingly reified ethnic boundaries, granted legitimacy to the PKK and led many Kurds to identify, instead, with the HDP. Consequently, in the June 2015 elections, at the height of the Solution Process and right before its demise, the HDP received more than 50 percent of the votes in the region whereas the AKP’s total vote share plummeted to around 15 percent. Overall, therefore, the AKP opened an unprecedented platform for articulation of ethnic Kurdish interests and continues to engage with Kurds to garner their support, albeit with little sustained electoral success.

The AKP’s most recent partner is situated at the opposite end of the Turkish political spectrum from the Kurdish constituencies. The 2018 presidential and parliamentary electoral alliance between the ‘People’s Alliance’ (Cumhur İttifakı) with the ultra-nationalist Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetiçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) formed after the Gülenist coup attempt in July 2016. While nationalism dominates, most of MHP’s constituency is also religiously conservative. Therefore, voter shifts between the two parties are not unprecedented albeit on a much smaller
scale (e.g. 2011 elections, see Aydınlı-Düzgit 2012). However, the alliance with the AKP, led by MHP’s leader Devlet Bahçeli, split the 50-year-old party when Meral Akşener and her cadre exited to form the Good Party (İyi Parti) after the 2015 elections. Even so, the combined support of AKP constituents, Bahçeli and that of the remaining MHP voters, sufficed to garner the AKP 42 percent of the vote in the parliamentary elections. Furthermore, relying on this alliance Erdoğan had the support he needed in the controversial 2017 referendum that amended the constitution to change Turkey’s parliamentary system to a presidential system with expansive powers (Bertrand 2017), and returned him to the executive with 53 percent of the votes in the first election to the presidency after the referendum.

The cause and consequences of this alliance include a return to the national security paradigm as opposed to the more conciliatory approach in dealing with the PKK and growing anti-Western rhetoric in foreign policy. It remains to be seen if this alliance will be sustained in the face of the deepening economic crisis and coming foreign policy challenges such as the end of Syrian Civil War and increasingly strained relations with the United States.⁹

In sum, the AKP exhibits all the traits of a religiously conservative, if not Islamist, party, a label that the party’s leadership has long denied. In concert with its authoritarian tendencies, the religious tone in the AKP’s politics became more overt over time. Even though fears of a sharia-based regime that interferes in private lives of the citizens have not materialised, the Islamisation of the public sphere through policies such as burgeoning number of the state-funded religious schools, the large share in the central government budget allocated to the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı), and state support to religious NGOs exclusively, still raise questions. However, despite this strong religious undertone, the political appeals of the AKP are not limited to religious issues. The party has successfully formed numerous strategic alliances with more or less religious actors at different times, including but not limited to the liberal intelligentsia, provincial capitalists, ethnic Kurds and Turkish nationalists, using a variety of constituency-specific secular appeals ranging from economic liberalism to ethnic politics, in addition to the faith. These alliances were instrumental to the AKP’s success to take office in 2002 and to its consolidation of its power through subsequent electoral victories.

Religion in all party and candidate agendas: the rise of Islam in Indonesian politics

On 17 April 2019, Prabowo Subianto lost the presidential elections to the incumbent Joko Widodo.¹⁰ Both candidates had picked running mates with strong religious credentials; Widodo’s running mate Ma’ruf Amin is reportedly ‘the country’s most senior Islamic cleric’ (Aditya and Abraham 2019). This election illustrates the current importance of religion, Sunni Islam, to national politics in Indonesia. Similarly, polls suggest that Islam is increasingly important to social and political discourse (Tanuwidjaja 2010; Aditya and Abraham 2019) and that conservative orthodox interpretations of the faith are edging out more syncretic versions (Ufen 2008). Paradoxically, at the same time, collective vote shares for major Islamist parties have not improved, counting 36 percent and 38 percent in the 1999 and 2004 elections, 26 percent in 2009, and 31 percent in 2014 (Cochrane 2014).

In this section, we ask what explains why support for Islamist parties is not increasing as Islam is becoming increasingly prominent in Indonesian politics. Recent research shows that religious affiliation in Indonesia is not strongly related to the economic and political preferences of highly diverse Indonesian constituencies (Pepinsky et al. 2018). Thus, our explanation of this puzzle suggests that Islamist parties are failing to consolidate a convincing secular programmatic appeal at the same time that secular parties, which realise the increasing importance of Islam in
Indonesian politics, are effectively incorporating religious concerns into their platform. Consequently, while they are not gaining new secular constituencies, Islamist parties are losing their pious supporters who care about policies other than religion only to secular parties that better articulate both types of interests and preferences.

An Indonesian political legacy is that of Sarekat Islam, a coalition of secular and Islamist nationalist groups, which led the movement for Indonesia’s independence from the Dutch in 1945. Islamist nationalists tried to include, in the 1945 constitution, the Jakarta Charter which aimed to have Indonesia, a Muslim majority country, ruled by Islamic sharia law. Secular nationalists, concerned about losing the support of large non-Muslim minorities, i.e. the Hindu Balinese and Christian populations, prevailed and omitted the Charter from the constitution (McDonald 2015: 19). Subsequently, Islamist and secular nationalist groups coalesced and competed in the Indonesian party system. For example, during Sukarno’s ‘Guided democracy’ that lasted 22 years, his Indonesian National Party (Partai Nasional Indonesia, PNI), founded in 1927, included different factions subscribing to Islam, Marxism or nationalism.

To keep identity fragmentation minimised, Sukarno formulated in 1945 an official ideology: Pancasila, which prescribes five principles of governance for the unity of Indonesia. One is belief in a supreme God, which in practice extends citizenship to populations who practise Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism or Confucianism. Suharto’s subsequent rightist and military-backed 30-year reign implemented his own version of Pancasila by consolidating the party system into three groups, which were obliged to proclaim Pancasila as their central ideology. Golkar was the government association of functional groups, PDI pooled minorities and nationalists, and Islamist groups were merged in the Unity Development Party (PPP). Because Suharto’s supporters were installed in every organisation, including Islamist ones, religion was mostly relegated to the private sphere until the transition to democracy in 1999. Aside from a brief backlash after Suharto’s fall, Pancasila is still viewed as the glue that holds together the different ethnic and religious groups in Indonesia. Thus, while Islamist parties freely declare their religious ideology only very few openly espouse an intention to change the regime (Hadiz 2016).

Consistent with the original interpretation of Pancasila, Clifford Geertz (1960) observed that Indonesians mobilise in aliran (streams) where syncretic abangan, orthodox Muslim santri and Hindu priyayi organise politically within their groups, into different political parties and vote in blocs (Aspinall 2011; Hefner 2018). According to King (2003), the major aliran party cleavages expressed in the 1999 elections during democratisation were similar to those found in 1955. However, while dynamics of party politics still adhere to the traditional aliran, following the 2004 elections, Ufen (2008: 6) argues that the options for voters have changed and social constituencies have become more detached from their party choices.

The institutional context underpinning this political change was the sweeping reform during and after re-democratisation in 1999. Among other things this institutional change transformed Indonesia’s governing structures from being highly centralised to devolving substantial power to local governments (Nordholt and van Klinken 2007). At the same time, the party law was changed to require greater national presence of parties and the electoral system was changed in ways that made elections more direct – especially for local heads of government (Hicken and Kasuya 2003; Erb and Sulistiyanto 2009; Dettman et al. 2017). While many laud the new institutional design for decreasing ethnic contention (Reilly 2006) and increasing ethnic coalition-building (Aspinall 2011), others posit that the complex institutional design and its practical consequences augment clientelism at every level of governance (Mietzner 2013; Tomsa 2018: 95). Scholars also suggest the reforms weakened the party system and increased electoral volatility (Carothers 2006). Furthermore, some argue that parties that articulated interests of different social
constituencies are replaced with charismatic leadership and personal reputation in the new system (Fox and Menchik 2011).

Patronage politics, however, is systemic in Indonesia and does not explain why secular parties are recruiting pious constituents away from more overtly religious parties. One important reason for this trend – we suggest – is that Islamist parties have lost the edge they gained during democratisation as uncorrupt representatives of a moderate religious agenda with emphasis on inclusion and a variety of secular policies. This change has occurred at the same time that religion was becoming increasingly important in Indonesia, in part due to the institutional changes requiring national constituencies for party registration. This institutional structure incentivises all parties to compete for the national religious constituency and likely some religious parties to push a more religiously conservative agenda, alienating their supporters who care about moderation and secular policies.

During re-democratisation, beginning in 1998 when Suharto’s Pancasila-based dictatorship collapsed, Islamist parties differentiated themselves from nationalist and secular parties with their religious agenda but also with their claim of being less corrupt than other parties. In 2004, the Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, PKS), for instance, promised to end corruption and with this promise attracted secular middle-class urban voters. This won the party several governor positions as well as ministries in President Yudhoyono’s coalition government (Onishi 2009). The party’s stated agenda at the time included implementation of sharia rule but this seemingly did not deter voters, who were weary of corrupt secular governments (Bulkin 2013), and the party won plurality in major cities like Jakarta (22 percent) (Aspinall 2005: 19).

Over time, however, Islamic parties themselves became associated with corruption in the establishment and lost their edge on this front (Onishi 2009). For instance, the leader of the National Awakening Party (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, PKB), Abdurrahman Wahid, a religious cleric who served as president between 1999 and 2001, was impeached from the presidency due to the Buloggate and Bruneiigate scandals where he was accused of using state funds for personal reasons and of accepting gifts, including US$2 million from the Sultan of Brunei (Budiman 2001). Similarly, despite a recent revival in 2019 elections, the PKS lost credibility when its leadership became implicated in a graft scandal in 2013, and the PPP credibility is currently being questioned in relation to an alleged bribery case centring on a promotion at the Religious Affairs Ministry (Kahfi 2019).

Another way Islamist parties originally appealed to voters was through moderate community ties that cut across religion. The PKB, for example, had deep roots in Indonesia’s largest Islamist organisation, the NU, that appealed to rural, traditionalist Javanese, abangan and santri alike. The National Mandate Party (Partai Amanat Nasional, PAN), in turn, provided services through Muhammadiyah, the moderate and second largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia, and remained committed to political moderation. For example, when the more radical Crescent Moon and Star Party (Partai Bintang Bulan, PBB) and PPP proposed to amend the constitution in 2000–2001 so that sharia law would be enforced for Muslim citizens, Muhammadiyah and the NU opposed the proposal (Hefner 2018: 213). This moderation earned the PAN, for example, the support of Christians in Papua (Bulkin 2013).

However, after the institutional reform, secular parties begun courting religious constituencies more aggressively and some Islamist parties took a conservative turn in an attempt to retain pious voters, which likely further alienated some of their supporters. For example, in 2017, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, known as Ahok, was sentenced to prison for blasphemy when he quoted a Qur’anic verse during his re-election campaign for Jakarta governor (Lamb 2017). It was the Islamists who led the charge against Ahok by organising mass street protests. Following the ouster and imprisonment of Ahok, the subsequent movement, called the 212, including
some of the more conservative Islamist organisations, sought to further advance a conservative Islamist agenda but with little political resonance (IPAC 2018). Consequently, realising the increased importance of the religious vote, secular parties also pushed for Ahok’s indictment. This included president Widodo, who took great care to distance himself from his former ally. As the candidate of the Pancasila-based incumbent party PDI-P in the 2019 election, Widodo aligned with a Muslim cleric, Ma’ruf Amin, who is the supreme leader and chairman of Indonesian Ulema Council, the central authority in Indonesia that issues fatwas (Dewi 2018).

Religious appeals have increased in importance in elections to all major offices in Indonesia (Aspinall 2011). After the institutional change requiring national registration of political parties, this is hardly surprising as Islam is the only pan-Indonesian identity represented in most localities. In addition to overtly religious parties, Pancasila-based and nationalist, secular parties use religion in national and local level politics to court support across the political spectrum. With their religious agenda, Islamist parties still likely appeal to conservative religious voters and to some voters on the basis of their social outreach. However, they are seemingly less effective than are their secular counterparts at combining religious appeals with the variety of secular programmatic appeals voters care about, especially as some of the Islamist parties push for more conservative interpretations of Islam.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined how religious parties appeal to constituencies with varying religious and secular preferences and what determines their success or failure. We argued that religious parties that strategically build coalitions and effectively appeal to secular policy concerns in their discourse and programmatic platforms, in addition to religious appeals, have greater success at the polls. In the case of Turkey, the AKP formed numerous alliances with religious and secular actors at different times, including but not limited to the liberal intelligentsia, provincial capitalists, ethnic Kurds and Turkish ultra-nationalists, using a variety of appeals, i.e. economic liberalism, EU membership, Kurdish ethnic appeals and Islam. These pragmatic alliances were instrumental to the AKP’s success in taking office in 2002 and its dominance in subsequent elections. Indonesia, on the other hand, shows that despite the opportunity that the sudden fall of Suharto’s secular dictatorship granted, Islamic parties were not able to consolidate their original support as the best choice of a pious public, because that public also cares about a great variety of other issues in ways that do not correlate well with religion. Moreover, Indonesia’s secular parties have stepped in to build the kind of alliances that AKP formed, with religious clerics and Islamist mass organisations, to better represent the interests of religious Indonesian constituencies. Together, the cases of Turkey and Indonesia are interesting, since surveys show that both societies have recently become more religiously conservative. However, only the former witnessed the rise and reign of a pragmatic Islamist political party through coalition-building across more and less religious actors and policy areas, while the latter saw secular parties successfully follow this strategy, with Islamist parties seemingly not living up to their potential.

Notes

1 In contrast, the Democratic Party is perceived as secular if not neutral to religion (Layman 2001) but still manages to get the votes of low-commitment members of other religions (Castle 2018).
2 For a recent review of the role of religion in political mobilisation, see Birnir and Overos (2019).
3 The most notable exception is the Gülen Movement, which is referred to as Fethullah Terrorist Organization (FETO) by Turkey after the July 2016 coup attempt. The multifaceted and tangled relationship between the AKP and the Gülenists is beyond the scope of this study.
The 1970s in Turkey was plagued by intense political violence by radical left-wing and right-wing organisations that claimed around 5,000 lives. On 12 September 1980, the military overthrew the civilian government for its inability to cease political violence.

The beginning of the transformation of the civil–military relations in Turkey actually pre-dated the AKP and was at least partially consented to by the military as a necessary step towards the objective of EU membership (Satana 2008).

Taqiyah is an Arabic term that means ‘caution against danger’ and refers to dissimulation of religious beliefs in the face of potential persecution. Although the term derives from Islamic jurisprudence, it was employed by the AKP’s secularist critics to emphasise that the Islamist nature of the party has not changed; it is merely disguised.

Turkey’s Kurdish Question originates in the resistance of autonomous semi-feudal Kurdish rulers to centralising reforms of the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century. Kurdish nationalism developed in the wake of the First World War and became a prominent motive in anti-centralisation Kurdish revolts of the early republican Turkey. The Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) was born in the 1970s in close alliance with the Turkish radical left. The PKK insurgency has claimed tens of thousands of lives in the last 40 years.

In 2014, BDP leadership adopted a new strategy and formed the HDP in alliance with many radical left-wing factions in Turkey. This alliance is reflected in the cadre and MPs of the party; however, it is still closely associated with the PKK and its agenda is driven by Kurdish ethnic demands.

Including but not limited to disagreements over Gülenists (FETO), US policy in Syria and Turkey’s procurement of Russian S-400 Air Defense System.

In 2004, the electoral system in Indonesia changed to allow direct elections of Indonesia’s national and local heads and deputy heads of government. Subianto is backed by Gerindra and Widodo’s party is the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan, PDI-P); however, the influence and contribution of parties is minimal in presidential elections.

References


Religion and interest articulation


